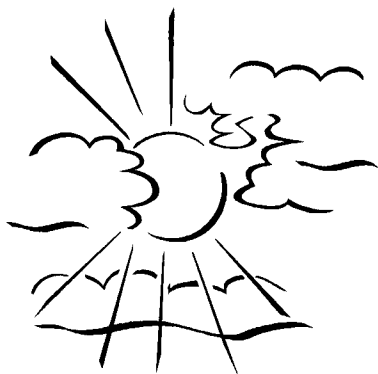


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Friday, September 30, 2005

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Final budget bills go to Granholm, who plans vetoes Governor must sign off today for new fiscal year

By Chris Andrews
and Stacey Range

School buses will be inspected. Private college students will get their grants. And proposed cuts to welfare and Medicaid didn't make it into the new budget for the spending year that begins Saturday.

Overall, many of the most significant cuts proposed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Republican lawmakers earlier this year ended up being partially or fully restored - in part because the state is expecting to take in about \$135 million more in revenue than anticipated.

"It looks like both sides were able to protect the things that seem most important to them," said Tom Clay of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan.

Lawmakers completed work on the 2005-06 budget Wednesday, and Granholm must sign the bills by today since the new fiscal year begins Saturday.

Granholm said Thursday she will veto items in a number of budget bills, but she would not say which.

The 2005-06 general fund budget is almost \$9 billion, up about 3.6 percent from this year. The \$12.8 billion school aid budget is up 2.3 percent.

Nancy Allarding was grateful that her family was spared pain. The Hastings mother has two children in college and depends on the \$2,000 annual grant she gets from the state to help offset tuition at Alma College for her daughter, Samantha. Granholm had proposed eliminating the grants for private college students.

"We were very nervous about that," Allarding said.

"It might not seem like a lot of money, but it's a huge gift for us."

Preserves safety net

Granholm said the budget protected education and preserved the safety net for the poor. She fended off efforts by Republicans to cut monthly welfare grants by an average of \$50 per family and eliminate assistance for those who have been on welfare for more than four years.

Republicans hailed the fact that the budget was enacted without raising taxes or fees. Granholm proposed a tax on physicians that would have generated additional federal money for Medicaid. Instead, Medicaid providers will see a 3 percent cut in reimbursements.

Public schools will get an extra \$175 per student as Granholm proposed but not the additional \$50 she wanted for each high school student.

State police funds cut

Lawmakers also went along with Granholm's proposal to eliminate \$3.4 million that funds the fire investigation unit of the state police. Fire officials in small communities say the investigators provide much needed expertise that their own departments don't have.

"We have absolutely no idea what's going to happen to us," said state police Lt. Chad Coney, who investigates fires in the Lansing area.

"No matter what happens, fire investigation is going to end up suffering as a result of this cut."

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Friday, September 30, 2005

State budget has few cuts, no tax hikes But state police lose three posts, doctors get smaller Medicaid refund, arts funding is cut 17%.

By Mark Hornbeck and Charlie Cain / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Lawmakers thought this would be the toughest state budget ever: a \$700 million revenue shortfall following several years of spending cutbacks with few choices left but to squeeze services that matter to people.

But the \$40 billion spending blueprint passed this week by lawmakers and expected to be signed today by Gov. Jennifer Granholm boosts money for schools and colleges, does not trim aid to local governments, kicks nobody off Medicaid health care or welfare rolls -- all without raising taxes or fees.

So how did they do it?

First, they found a few more cookie jars. The budget-balancing act includes \$250 million worth of one-time revenues, such as the sale of state lands, anticipated interest on tobacco settlement receipts to be sold to investors and an additional \$30 million or so to be wrung from delinquent taxpayers. Also, the economy is starting to recover, so now state number crunchers expect the treasury to take in an additional \$150 million.

And the state figures to secure another \$13 million from the lottery's new Keno game.

Critics say these Band-Aid measures will bail out the budget this year but will do nothing to solve the state's longer-term problem: Michigan doesn't collect enough taxes to meet fast-growing spending needs.

"Again, they're putting off problems into next year, and the year after that, and the year after that," said Robert Kleine, an economist and former state budget official. "It looks like we're already \$700 million short for next year (the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, 2006)."

Among the cuts:

- Three state police posts will be shuttered by early November, including the one in Oakland County's Groveland Township. The closures will save the state about \$1.1 million. The Oakland post has 14 troopers who respond to about 4,000 calls annually in Groveland, Holly and Rose townships.

The other posts to be closed are in the Upper Peninsula's Iron River and West Michigan's Grand Haven.

- Granholm is expected to veto today the \$18 million earmarked for the Baldwin youth prison in Northern Michigan. The 229 employees at Baldwin will be offered other state Corrections jobs. The governor said she also plans other line-item vetoes today but declined to elaborate.

- The state will cut reimbursement by 3 percent to doctors and hospitals that provide Medicaid services to 1.4 million people. In addition, recipients of Medicaid will see new co-pays: \$1 for outpatient visits, \$2 for doctor visits; and \$50 for the first day in a hospital.

For the first time, some Medicaid recipients will have to sign a personal responsibility agreement, promising to keep doctor's appointments, not smoke and maintain a healthy lifestyle. That will be started next year on a pilot basis.

Tom Clay, an analyst for the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, fears the state budget may be lowballing the amount of money needed to pay for Medicaid. He said caseload projections could be overly optimistic, and the budget is based on federal approval of relaxed rules on HMO reimbursement. "Medicaid has needed supplemental funding the last four or five years, and it looks like that may happen again in this budget."

Greg Bird, spokesman for the state budget office, replied: "We can only go with the best information available at the time on caseloads and what the feds might do."

- Funding to the arts will be slashed 17 percent, which will affect zoos, museums, symphonies, theaters and dance companies.

On the positive side, universities will see slight increases, although students and parents had to pony up average 11 percent increases this fall partly to pay for deep cuts in past years. And K-12 school aid will rise by \$175 per student, but school district officials say most or all of that will be eaten up by increases in pension and health care costs for employees.

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Governor plans to issue budget vetoes Friday

9/29/2005, 6:13 p.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Thursday that all state budget bills will be signed by the start of the new fiscal year Saturday, but added she won't release a list of vetoes until Friday.

On the line are a youth prison near Baldwin and cuts to other programs.

She's expected to sign a state police budget that closes posts in Grand Haven, Oakland County's Groveland Township and the Upper Peninsula's Iron River, but said she hopes a supplemental budget appropriation can be worked out that would keep the posts open.

The governor, who has taken Republican legislative leaders to task in recent weeks for not moving quickly enough on her jobs development proposals, praised them for their work on the budget.

"It shows some great bipartisan cooperation, and that's good for all of us," she told reporters during a news conference at her Capitol office.

She said her vetoes will be based partly on financial considerations and partly on philosophical ones. The Democratic governor has differed with GOP legislative leaders over some budget provisions.

Sen. Alan Cropsey, a DeWitt Republican who helped draw up the corrections budget, said Granholm should leave funding for the youth prison in place and instead make other reductions in the corrections department.

Ending the state's contract with the prison would devastate Lake County and possibly send the county, the city of Baldwin and its school district into receivership, he said.

"The economic repercussions will devastate the community," Cropsey said. "How much is it going to cost the state to pick up the pieces afterwards?"

The state plans to help more than 200 workers at the prison find jobs in other corrections facilities, but Cropsey said means the area's tax base would erode further.

Granholm, however, disagreed with Cropsey's assessment.

"Many of those who work at the Baldwin facility don't live in Lake County as it is," she said.

The governor also praised House Republicans for sending a bill to the Senate that will allow the state to sell some of its future tobacco settlement money to raise \$1 million for investment in new high-tech businesses.

But she said she still wants lawmakers to change the Michigan Merit Scholarship so \$4,000 would go to students after they complete two years of college or training. Republicans want to keep the current plan in place, which offers high school students who do well on standardized tests \$2,500 to start their college careers.

Granholm said she also is waiting for the GOP-led House and Senate to pass a bill that would speed up spending on state building projects and create more jobs.

She noted that it's unlikely she or Senate Republican leaders would accept a House-passed plan that would lower the state's main corporate tax by 0.1 percent in both 2007 and 2008 and create new business tax credits.

The nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency said the House plan would cost the state about \$783 million in tax revenue over five years. Granholm wants to cut the business tax from 1.9 percent to 1.2 percent in 2006, but would balance the cut with increases on insurance premiums and an end to some business tax exemptions, making it revenue-neutral.

"The tax bill has to be responsible. The Senate and I are committed to that," Granholm said.

"One baby step has been taken, and that's good news. But we still have a long way to go."

Rich Studley of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce said he'd rather see no business tax cut at all if the Senate plans to follow Granholm's example and pay for the cuts with tax increases on some businesses.

"If they were back to some kind of revenue-neutral tax shift, it would probably be better if they just dropped it and moved onto something else," he said.

Some business leaders are willing to forgo tax cuts now, hoping they'll get an even bigger cut if Republican Dick DeVos defeats Granholm in next year's governor's race.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>

Michigan Chamber of Commerce: <http://www.michamber.com/>

GOVERNOR SIGNS FIRST BUDGETS; HINTS OF VETOES

The first of the budget bills for the 2005-06 year, which begins Saturday, have been signed by Governor Jennifer Granholm, who told reporters she will use her line-item veto power to strike some items. She would not tip her hand on what she will target – not even the widely-expected veto of funds for the privately-run youth prison in Baldwin – and expressed hope that she will find a way to keep open three State Police posts which are slated to be closed in the new fiscal year.

The contract with the GEO Group for the Baldwin prison expires at midnight Friday and Department of Corrections officials say it will take three to five days to transfer the 470 inmates to other facilities.

“There will be some vetoes,” Ms. Granholm told reporters. “You’ll have to wait to see what we do on the budget.” She said the vetoes would be based both on economics and philosophical differences. And, Ms. Granholm said some things made their way into the bills that had not been agreed to in negotiations between leaders.

The governor reiterated her hopes that money for the three State Police posts – Iron River, Grand Haven and Groveland Township – will be included in a supplemental appropriation. The posts will stay open for 60 days before they are slated for closure.

State Police officials said they had not yet decided how troopers and other staff would be reallocated from those posts.

The Baldwin prison veto seems all but certain and the Department of Corrections, working with the Department of Civil Service, will meet Friday with the staff preparing to hire as many qualified persons who are willing to possibly relocate.

But Frank Elo, warden of the prison, said he and the employees remain in the dark as to what will occur as of midnight Friday when the contract expires and said the GEO Group made a last-minute offer to cut the cost of the contract by at least \$2 million a year. He said the state has not contacted the company to temporarily extend the contract to facilitate the transfer of prisoners.

“I’m a little angry that they have not even shared with us what is going to happen,” Mr. Elo said. “It’s all been hush-hush.”

The state had given the company a 60-day notice that it was terminating the lease. Corrections spokesperson Leo Lalonde said 320 prisoners would be transferred to the Thumb Correctional Facility, with others scattered throughout the system.

Gary Manns, director of Human Resources for the department, said the state can absorb as many of the 126 corrections officers as are willing to work in state prisons and can hire many of the other staff such as command officers, food service workers and health care staff as well.

He said corrections officers who have undergone training similar to what the state provides in its academy program will not have to meet that requirement and that a special academy would be provided for others. He added some civil service rules could also be waived to provide for as speedy a transfer as possible.

While all reviews are done on a case-by-case basis, he said, "We will try to reduce any hurdles out there to get people in as soon as we can."

Dennis Cawthorne, a lobbyist for the GEO Group, also said the company is holding the state to honoring a 20-year contract for the lease of the building. He said the company has legal advice from Miller Canfield Paddock and Stone that the \$5.7 million-a-year lease remains enforceable even with the cancellation of the four-year contract to house prisoners.

"They have not properly taken the steps to break this," he said. "They will be in breach of contract if they break the lease and would be liable for damages."

Mr. Cawthorne continued to urge the governor to approve funds for the prison, which he said pays about \$1 million in local property taxes and provides a significant economic boost "to this already impoverished county."

Management and Budget spokesperson Bridget Medina had no immediate comment on the lease issue and what options the state is reviewing.

BILL SIGNINGS: The first vetoes were delivered in three of the five budget bills the governor signed late Wednesday.

In the \$334.1 million general government budget ([SB 272](#), PA 146), the governor removed \$500,000 of carryforward funds for the prisoner reimbursement program in the Department of Attorney General, a move similar to what she did last year as she explained the allotment would have given the attorney general more money than provided in the funding target. Budget officials said they intend to carryforward to the next fiscal year up to \$250,000.

The governor also said one provision is unenforceable: language barring the Department of Civil Service from administering a campaign committee or soliciting or receiving funds for such a committee.

Struck from the \$4.3 billion budget for the Department of Human Services (SB 271, PA 147) was a \$50,000 reduction in funding for food stamp error rates in Kent and Muskegon counties because it was not part of a federally-approved plan.

In the \$119.2 million budget for the Department of Agriculture (SB 264, PA 148), the governor vetoed \$20,000 in equine funds earmarked for a private group, the Communications Alliance to Network Thoroughbred Ex-racehorses, which the bill said was to support racehorse rehabilitation programs but which the governor said is not a core function.

Also signed were:

- SB 277 (PA 145), the \$118 million Military and Veterans Affairs budget, which includes a shutdown of six armories saving \$300,000 annually.
- SB 275 (PA 149), the \$155 million budget for the Judiciary.

Medicare drug plan changes and you

Benefits vary, and deadlines are key

September 30, 2005

BY RUBY L. BAILEY

FREE PRESS WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON -- Starting Saturday, Michigan's 1.5 million Medicare recipients will begin getting sales pitches -- in the mail and by phone -- from insurers touting prescription drug plans under the Medicare law.

The drug benefit is the first major change to Medicare, the nation's health plan for people who are disabled or 65 and older, since it was enacted in 1965.

Sign-up for the coverage begins Nov. 15. Now's the time to begin studying options to find the plan that best fits your needs.

Ten national and several regional plans are among the options. Here are answers to questions about the new program.

QUESTION: What am I supposed to do with all the stuff from companies trying to convince me to sign up for their plans?

ANSWER: Don't toss it on the counter or throw it away. Use the information from insurers to compare co-pays, deductibles and other benefits.

Q: Is there any urgency to sign up quickly?

A: Be aware of all deadlines. You have from Nov. 15 to May 15 to join a plan.

If you don't join by May 15, you won't be able to join until Nov. 15, 2006.

When you eventually sign up, you'll pay 1% more for every month you missed the May 15 deadline.

Q: Is this for poor people only?

A: No. In fact, advocates for seniors agree that most Medicare recipients will benefit by signing up for one of the plans.

People with low incomes can qualify for lower premiums and co-pays.

Q: How do I know if I qualify for extra assistance?

A: Your yearly income must be at or below \$14,355 if you are single or \$19,245 if married and living with your spouse.

Also, your personal property -- not including your house, cars, furniture or jewelry -- must be valued below \$11,500 for a single adult and \$23,000 for a married couple.

If you qualify, you'll pay no monthly premiums or deductibles and co-pays will be \$1-\$2 for generic drugs or \$3-\$5 for name-brand drugs.

You can apply for extra help through the Social Security Administration.

Q: How do I qualify to join the drug plan?

A: If you already receive Medicare, you qualify.

Typically, a person who is 65 or older or on disability qualifies.

RELATED CONTENT

Important dates
for Medicare drug
plan

FOR MORE HELP

- Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, www.mymmap.org or 800-803-7174
- AARP, www.aarp.org or 888-687-2277
- Medicare drug plans are online at www.medicare.gov or by calling 800-633-4227

Q: How does Medicare prescription drug coverage work?

A: You'll pay a premium with most plans ranging from slightly less than \$20 to \$68 per month per person (no discount for couples).

Then, typically, you pay the first \$250 as a deductible and the plan covers 75%, or \$1,500, of the next \$2,000, no matter what plan you chose.

From \$2,250 to \$5,100, you pay 100%.

After that, catastrophic coverage begins.

At this level, you will pay only \$2 a prescription for generic drugs and \$5 a prescription for brand-name drugs, or 5% of the cost of each prescription -- whichever is higher.

Q: I already have drug coverage. Do I need this?

A: Depends.

If you have coverage as a retiree benefit, the company has to send you a letter telling you whether your current coverage is creditable -- as good as what Medicare will offer.

If it is creditable, the employer can get a subsidy from the government to continue the benefit.

If it's not, you should consider the Medicare program coverage.

Q: How can I tell if my current insurance coverage is better than what I could get from Medicare?

A: You should receive a written notice saying whether your coverage is creditable.

If you don't receive this information by the end of October, call your company. It must respond in writing.

Q: Can I keep my private insurance and still join a Medicare program?

A: No. If your current insurance is creditable or better, it probably would be best to keep what you have.

Q: What if I don't sign up for Medicare drug coverage right away?

A: You'll likely be without prescription drug coverage until you join and, depending on when you sign up, it could cost you more.

If you miss the May deadline, you won't be able to enroll until November 2006.

The penalty for signing up late is an extra 1% of the national average premium for each month (or 12% for each year).

Q: I won't be eligible until next year. Is that a problem?

A: No. Use the insurance you have currently and compare the Medicare plans when you are eligible.

Q: I have Medicaid and Medicare. How does this affect me?

A: Starting in January, people who are eligible for Medicare no longer will be able to use Medicaid.

Those who qualify only for Medicaid, which is designed to help poor people and children, will continue to get assistance through the state's program.

Q: Are the plans all the same?

A: Plans will differ in the cost of premiums and deductibles, drugs covered and which pharmacies they use. Some will offer a mail-order option.

Typically, each plan will cover at least two drugs in each classification, as well as offer name-brand and generic drugs. Check each plan's list for a particular brand-name drug.

You should be able to compare plans starting Oct. 13 on the Medicare Web site, www.medicare.gov.

The Medicare and You 2006 handbook will have a comparison description and should be mailed soon.

Q: What if I don't take medications right now or only take them occasionally. Should I still sign up now?

A: Maybe. You'd still have to pay the premiums, though you aren't taking any medications now. But you'll pay a penalty if you delay enrollment.

Q: What if I have a Medicare drug-discount card?

A: The Medicare-approved drug-discount card program ends in 2006.

You will be able to continue using your card until May 15, or until you sign up for Medicare drug coverage, whichever is sooner.

Q: How do I know the calls and brochures are legitimate?

A: If you receive a phone inquiry, don't give your Social Security number, bank account number or credit card numbers.

If you're unsure about the legitimacy of a company, get a name and phone number and tell them you will call them back. Then check with Medicare, the Social Security Administration or Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program.

Look for the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services logo on any correspondence.

There also is a Medicare RX logo on all approved plans.

Q: Who can help me make these decisions?

A: Start by making a list of all your prescription drugs. Beside each one, write the price you now pay. You can use this list to figure out what you pay for your drugs over the course of a year and how much you will save with Medicare coverage.

If you don't have records, your pharmacy should be able to help.

Check your list against the Medicare drug plan formula that most closely matches the list of drugs you take.

If you don't have Internet access, or are not familiar with searching for information online, ask a family member or friend for help.

Information for the answers to questions posed in this story came from Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, the Medicare program and AARP.

Contact RUBY BAILEY at 202-906-8203 or bailey@freepress.com.

Editorials

The Detroit Free Press

Choose prescription plan carefully, and there are resources to help

September 30, 2005

Starting Saturday, you are going to be bombarded with ads and flyers telling you how to choose your Medicare drug plan. Some of the material may be confusing and even seem alarming. But you have time to learn what you need to know -- and plenty of help to figure it out. See the Free Press Q&A on

Page 1 today. More coverage is coming in the weeks ahead. There are plenty of other objective resources to help you select from the 20 programs approved for Michigan.

First things first: Though your mailbox may be stuffed with solicitations, you don't have to make any immediate decisions. In fact, you can't even sign up until Nov. 15 and, unless you're on the state's elder insurance plan, EPIC, you don't have to make the switch until May 15. But it would be good to be ready come Jan. 1 to begin taking advantage of the benefit.

AARP will offer you information, but be aware that the senior advocacy organization is expected to be in the prescription business, too, so make sure you're careful to recognize when AARP is providing solid information and when it's trying to sell something.

One of the best resources is the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, which you can access through one of 16 Area Agency on Aging branches around the state. They'll have plenty of trained volunteers available to help you sort through your options. If you call 800-803-7174, they'll route you to your local site. Or you can log on to www.mymmap.org.

The federal government, which is providing the drug benefit, also offers assistance, through its 24-hour hotline (800-633-4227) or its Web site, www.medicare.gov.

The point is to wade through the clutter that's coming your way, find resources you can trust, and make the smartest choice for yourself.

Long-term changes on the horizon

By Sally Barber, Cadillac News

Who will decide your future when you face the need for long-term care?

Proposed state reforms in the long-term care system are expected to build a more cohesive system, provide greater care options and offer better information to the fastest growing segment of our population, seniors.

"This is good news for the consumer," said Tom Czerwinski, executive director of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan. "It puts them in control and gives them more choices."

One of the criticisms of the existing system is that it forces people into institutions even when home care or other alternatives may be preferable, according to a report by the governor's Long-Term Care Task Force.

The new streamlined system is based on a network of designated "Single Point of Entry" agencies appointed to disseminate information, provide referrals, assist in developing person-centered care and offer enrollment into Medicaid-funded long-term care.

By calling one telephone number, an elder or family member can access a broad spectrum of resources.

"Anything helps that simplifies things," said Bonnie Forbes, executive director of Wexford County Council on Aging.

SPEs will have to accommodate skyrocketing numbers of elders in the years ahead. By the end of 2005, it is estimated there will be 60,000 to 62,000 seniors living in northwest Michigan. While Grand Traverse County has the largest population of those older than 60, Wexford and Missaukee counties, with 20 percent populations of seniors, have the greatest percentages of elders, according to Gregory Piaskowski, executive director of the Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Michigan. The agency serves 10 northern counties. In 25 years, the number of seniors living in the area is expected to double.

SPE success in caring for those seniors depends largely on adequate state funding, Piaskowski said. A nitty-gritty issue between metropolitan Michigan and rural Michigan is the cost of providing care in the different service regions.

"Trying to respond to people scattered geographically I think costs more and that's part of the friction," he said.

During the past seven years the agency has seen its funding cut in half and, as a result, has experienced its network of service providers shrink, including those providers offering in-home help.

Supporting home care is significantly less costly to the state than institutional long-term care. In-home help costs the state about \$10,000 per year per person, while nursing home care costs \$40,000. Currently, the state spends \$1.1 billion on nursing home care and \$100 million on home care services.

If the state can save 1.7 percent on long-term care, SPE program will pay for itself Czerwinski said. Similar programs in other states have proven successful in controlling costs. But to achieve the program's goals there will also need to be greater options enabling elders and the disabled to remain in their homes and communities.

"The legislature has to recognize in order to keep people in their homes and reduce nursing home care we have to invest funds in programs like Home Choice," Piakowski said.

Services helping to keep people at home include meals, personal care, respite care, private duty nursing, transportation, care management and others.

"We hope, over time, more people will be able to stay in their own homes," Czerwinski said.

Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan serves nine counties, including Osceola County. The agency is seeking to become one of three SPE pilot centers with a launch date of June 2006. Following implementation of the demonstration programs, about 15 SPE agencies will be established throughout the state within the next two years.

news@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

Effort aims to keep black babies alive

Friday, September 30, 2005

By Theresa D. McClellan
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Young mothers shared more than a meal when they broke bread with doctors, social workers and activists in a church basement Thursday night.

The talk focused on the news that black babies are three times more likely than white infants to die within their first year.

And when the talking stopped at New Hope Baptist Church, on the city's Southwest Side, everyone left the dinner with plans to make a difference.

The divergent voices came together for a summit called "Giving Birth to Hope and a Future."

It was a chance to share months of research on infant-mortality rates and to develop a plan by the end of October, said Barbara Hawkins Palmer, coordinator of Healthy Kent 2010.

About 250 people gathered in small groups to listen to reasons and solutions. Some were unaware of programs that link pregnant women with nurses. Some felt empowered seeing the room filled with people seeking remedies.

There were many factors cited for the disparity, including racism, class bias and inadequate health care for the poor and uninsured.

Some moms do not get adequate prenatal care because of a lack of transportation. Some said they felt judged, dismissed or neglected by their health-care providers and never returned.

"One mother said that this community has a stereotypical view of African-American families, seeing them as sick or in need of repair and only in terms of the mother and her baby, excluding the father," said Teresa Branson, program director of the Task Force on Health Care for People of Color.

Fear about revealing a pregnancy raised concerns about community attitudes preventing women from getting help.

"We have to teach our African-American women to empower themselves. We'll see a reversal of disparity," said Bonita Agee, of Strong Beginnings, a program run by the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute.

Each table had someone step forward to explain what was heard and what needed to be done.

Among the suggestions:

Make doctors accountable for inadequate care.

Give young women the knowledge of what they should expect from doctors.

Teach youths the difference between lust and love. Teen pregnancy often results from young girls having low self-esteem.

Make it acceptable to talk about sex in churches, schools and at home.

Mentoring programs, TV and radio ads and community forums were listed as strategies that work.

Rhondo Cooper, program director for Spectrum Health Healthier Communities, made the analogy of the canary used in coal mines to warn of deadly air.

"Our babies are our canaries," he said. "They are telling us that something is happening and they are leaving us. It's time for us to stop making so much noise and do something."

Food stamp cuts harmful

Grand Rapids Press Editorial

Friday, September 30, 2005

A growing number of working people with children have jobs but still can't make ends meet. A federal budget proposal stripping states of the flexibility to offer food stamps to those earning slightly above the poverty line is unwise and ill-timed. The change would plunge these families into poverty during tough economic times. Congress should recognize the fallout from such cuts will hurt children and end up costing the government over time.

The U.S. House and Senate Agricultural Committees have to cut \$3 billion over five years from programs to help rein in federal spending. More than half that hit is expected to be passed along to the food stamp program. The savings would come from eliminating a federal option that allows Michigan and 10 other states to consider other expenses such as housing and utility costs, when determining eligibility for food stamps.

Some 26,000 of Michigan's low wage workers or those receiving Social Security benefits would be impacted, according to the Department of Human Services. Last year, the state's monthly average for food stamp recipients was 943,713, up from 602,857 in 2000. Seventy-nine percent of food stamp households do not receive welfare. These are mainly working families in need of assistance after paying for housing and electricity.

The Census Bureau's latest poverty rate estimates show more Americans living in poverty than in 2004. A family who's total income for the year is less than what's appropriate for a family of their size is poor. For example, the average poverty threshold for a family of four is an income of \$19,307.

Marianne Udow, Michigan's human services director, is right to worry about the working poor slipping into poverty and the strain on food banks and other services already handling hurricane victims. The cuts would come in the midst of high gas prices, and with the prospect of heating bills increasing by \$56 a month.

Congress has to look for cost-savings to balance the budget, but a food program that keeps families afloat isn't the place to find them. Far more legitimate savings can be had in the agriculture budget by cutting the government's overly large supports for big farming operations. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, should be pushing such alternatives as a member of the Agricultural Committee.

The most vulnerable citizens don't have high-powered lobbyists. There are 36 million of them living below the poverty line in the United States. What Congress does shouldn't add to the problem.

Hunting for the hungry New program helps get meat from sportsmen to soup kitchens, shelters, food banks

Friday, September 30, 2005

By Jeff Kart
Bay CityTimes Writer

A buck for a buck.

While it's too late for Saturday's opening of bowhunting season for deer, Gov. Jennifer Granholm has signed a law encouraging hunters to donate \$1 to a program that funnels venison and other game to hungry people.

The money, collected when a person applies for a hunting license, will go to fund the cost of getting meat from hunters to soup kitchens and food banks.

The Sportsmen Against Hunger Program will benefit places like the Cornerstone Mission, a Bay City homeless shelter.

Currently, a volunteer group called Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger uses donations to process and distribute deer to Michigan's hungry. But the organization has been hampered by a lack of funds for processing costs, state officials say.

Dorothy Giffel, executive director of the Cornerstone Mission, said she hopes the dollar donation program will create more awareness and food.

The Bay City mission receives a few deer a year through donations, Giffel said, along with other wild game.

"It certainly does help out, and everybody likes it," she said.

Pat Beson, who runs Beson's Supermarket in Kawkawlin Township, said about six hunters donated venison through his store last year.

Hunters pay the cost of processing the deer, about \$60, and Beson delivers the meat to Cornerstone Mission, or calls to have it picked up by other missions. One deer will yield up to 70 pounds of meat, he said, and processing fees are tax-deductible.

The Food Bank of Eastern Michigan helps distribute about 11,000 pounds of donated venison and other wild game each year to soup kitchens and homeless shelters in 22 counties in Northeast Michigan, including Bay County, said Mike McDonald, vice president of business development for the Flint-based organization.

The Food Bank uses grants and donations to help pay for processing now.

He hadn't heard about the new law, but said, "That's a wonderful thing to help those in need."

McDonald said even before the \$1 program takes effect, hunters can still donate their wild game to the needy as long as they take it to a state-licensed processor. Bow-hunting season starts Saturday.

Dollars donated after the law takes effect will go into a fund, said Rep. Tory Rocca, R-Sterling Heights, who sponsored the legislation.

The state Department of Natural Resources will contract with a group, possibly the existing volunteer program, to use the money for processing and distributing donated wild game, Rocca said.

"It will pay for the actual costs of getting the game from the hunter to the person," he said.

Rocca said he's not sure how much the program might raise. About 750,000 people will purchase at least one deer license this year, the DNR says. The current volunteer program operates with a budget of \$28,000, and helped with 50,000 pounds of donated game in 2003.

"There's a good potential for it," Rocca said.

Similar \$1 programs in other states have resulted in yearly donations of 400,000 pounds of game in Wisconsin and 308,000 pounds in Virginia, state officials said.

- Jeff Kart covers the environment and politics for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9639 or by e-mail at jkart@bc-times.com.

WIC switches to e-pay

Friday, September 30, 2005

By Pat Rombyer

prombyer@citpat.com -- 768-4924

Jackson County is launching the state's first electronic pay system for women enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children program.

Traditionally, low-income mothers have used USDA coupons, or vouchers, to pay for certain grocery items including dairy, peanut butter, juices, cereal and infant formula.

Jackson County has been named a pilot site for a new electronic benefits transfer program. In 2000, it led the state by switching food stamp recipients to the successful card-swiping method.

"This is much better," said Taria Fleming, a Jackson mother of three who demonstrated the new payment method Thursday at the east side Meijer store following a press conference. "I don't have to wait while the cashier punches in the code."

If all goes well, the system will be used statewide, said Stan Bien, director of vendor management for the WIC division of the Michigan Department of Community Health. The three-month pilot program will be evaluated for cost and efficiency after the first of the year, he said. Jackson was selected because it is a major population center in the center of the county, Bien said.

Thirty-eight percent of the Jackson County WIC clients shop at Jackson's two Meijer stores.

There are about 3,000 households, or 5,200 women and children, who use WIC benefits locally and some 7.5 million nationwide.

Alethia Carr, director of Michigan's WIC program, said the electronic benefits program has been in the works for 10 years.

"It's been a monumental process," involving bankers, local county health officials, the USDA, the Michigan Department of Community Health and Meijer, she said.

She and about two dozen other officials from Washington, D.C., Lansing and Jackson County, gathered for the press conference.

"It's not just about the food," said Renee Marks, community health manager at the Jackson County Health Department. "The nutritional component is very important."

There are other benefits as well.

"It's easier for the grocers, the customers and the state," said Kate Coler, undersecretary for the USDA's Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services. "It serves the people with dignity and respect."

WIC customers at Meijer will be indistinguishable from the store's other shoppers, officials said. The cards may be used at other stores, but they will have another point of service device that the card must be swiped through.

At Meijer, WIC card holders will use the same device other shoppers use for credit and debit cards.

The method removes the stigma WIC and other welfare clients often face.

"I think we're going to see our (WIC) numbers go up," Marks said.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 29, 2005

Governor Granholm Calls for Extradition of New Mexico Man for Unpaid Child Support

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced that she has initiated proceedings to extradite a New Mexico man charged with failing to pay more than \$131,000 in child support, a felony crime punishable by four years in prison.

Chris Montoya was arrested by law enforcement officers in Santa Fe County, New Mexico in July. In January 1989, Montoya was ordered by the Wayne County Circuit Court in Michigan to pay \$88 per week for the support of his minor children but has failed to comply. As of August 2005 his unpaid child support obligations totaled \$131,933.53.

“Mr. Montoya has failed to meet his responsibility to support his children, and that has consequences,” Granholm said. “The state of Michigan will use all tools at its disposal to ensure that parents provide for their children.”

Upon return to Michigan, Montoya will face prosecution. In Michigan, non-support of a child is a felony punishable by up to four years in prison and/or a \$2,000 fine. Since taking office, Governor Granholm has requested the return, through the extradition process, of more than 100 parents who have failed to support their children as ordered by courts in Michigan.

Under the Uniform Criminal Extradition Act, the power to demand extradition of a fugitive who has fled from justice in Michigan and taken refuge in another state is vested in the governor. After receiving extradition documents, New Mexico officials can issue a warrant delivering the fugitive into the custody of Michigan authorities.

To encourage parents to pay their past due child support, the state is offering an amnesty period beginning October 1, 2005. Under the new law, parents who owe past due child support in Michigan will have a 90-day window to avoid state criminal and civil enforcement penalties. Penalties that have already been initiated will be waived with the exception of felony prosecutions or in circumstances where a delinquent parent has already been arrested due to failure or refusal to pay past due child support.

The amnesty program does not affect current support obligations. The amnesty program was established by Public Act 584 of 2004 and sponsored by Rep. Alexander Lipsey.

For more information regarding the amnesty program, parents can contact their local Friend of the Court office, call 1-866-540-0008, or visit www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on “Child Support.”

Friend of the Court adjusts to new home

Friday, September 30, 2005

By Paul Overeiner

povereiner@citpat.com -- 768-4917

The building has some rough edges, some equipment problems remain, but staff morale is good at the Friend of the Court offices, recently relocated to the old Health Department building on Lansing Avenue.

"If the building was in perfect shape and morale was in trouble I think you would have a big problem," said Chief Judge Chad Schmucker in a report to Jackson County commissioners Thursday.

Although some equipment troubles, namely the telephone system, are still being resolved, Schmucker warned that the bigger concern lies with the performance of the Citizen Advisory Committee.

Although not mandated, the committee was formed in Jackson County ostensibly as a source of innovation and improvement for a department that has been the focus of past public criticisms for not being "user friendly."

Instead committee meetings have become a sounding board for critics and activists who want to "destroy" the Friend of the Court and intimidate committee members by photographing or video taping them, Schmucker said.

"I am open to change and improvement," Schmucker said.

Commissioner James Videto, R-Spring Arbor, complained of a lack of consistency among office staff, that some clients seem to receive "different answers on different days."

Schmucker said he did not believe that was a widespread problem, but added: "Route complaints my way. If those things are happening they are not acceptable."

County Administrator Robert Elliott noted the office has endured a chaotic year, particularly in terms of state funding.

"We've got a new facility now and good staff morale," Elliott said. "Personally my position is we should revisit this in eight to 10 months."

Friday, September 30, 2005

Teen must serve pro-life center Judge's order for boy convicted of hitting girlfriend with a bat to end pregnancy prompts objections.

By Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A teenage boy convicted of striking his girlfriend with a baseball bat to end her pregnancy has been sentenced to 200 hours of community service at a pro-life pregnancy center, drawing objections from his lawyer and his family.

Macomb Circuit Judge Matthew Switalski on Thursday sentenced the 17-year-old Richmond teen to two years probation and community service at Compassion Pregnancy Centers, which has two locations in Macomb County.

The youth -- who pleaded no contest in August to hitting his 16-year-old girlfriend in the stomach with her consent to cause a miscarriage -- hugged the girl in the hallway outside the courtroom after the sentencing. The teens' names are being withheld because they are juveniles. According to Compassion Pregnancy Centers' Web site, the center is "directed by the Holy Spirit, will encourage and comfort women and their families who face a crisis pregnancy by: extending Christ-like compassion and the soul-saving good news of salvation; giving spiritual, emotional and physical support and educating about life issues."

Lawyer Miranda Massie said it was the teens' call to a similar pregnancy center that led to their decision to terminate their pregnancy in the first place.

"There are plenty of places he could do (for community service) that provide an unbiased, non-religious, non-sectarian view of women's options," Massie said.

"These kids called a place like this and got factually inaccurate information about what their options were. It's part of what led them into taking the actions they took into feeling they had no other option but to attempt a back-alley abortion."

The teen's father also criticized the decision.

"I think it was a bad call on the judge's part," said the father, whose last name is being withheld to protect his son's identity. "This is an in-your-face (move) by the judge. Why not send him to Planned Parenthood, where he could see all sides of being a parent?"

Switalski did not specify at which Compassion Pregnancy Centers location the teen would perform the community service. He said the teen could do odd jobs.

"He is not going there to be an advocate," Switalski said. "He is there to help out with any work that is needed. There needs to be some reckoning for what he did."

"We are a crisis center," said Barb Seifferlein, who works in client service at the center's Clinton Township location. "(Those providing community service) wouldn't have anything to do with the people who come in."

The teen was charged in January with assaulting a pregnant individual, causing a miscarriage. Prosecutors allege he struck his girlfriend in the stomach with a 22-inch miniature baseball bat over three weeks in early fall 2004.

The 6-month-old fetus died of premature birth associated with trauma to the mother, according to an autopsy by the Macomb County medical examiner.

Police learned about the incident in mid-November after the girl spoke about it while at a high school leadership conference. The adult facilitator contacted the Michigan State Police.

You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or ecardenas@detnews.com.

Sentence in fetus death questioned

Teen has to work at pregnancy center

September 30, 2005

BY NATE TRELA

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 17-year-old Richmond Township boy who tried to end his girlfriend's pregnancy by beating her with a miniature baseball bat will have to work at a crisis pregnancy center, despite objections from his attorney and concerns from his court-ordered counselor.

The boy, who pleaded no contest to the assault Aug. 31 in front of Macomb County Circuit Judge Matthew S. Switalski, will be on probation until he is 19 under the terms of his disposition hearing, the juvenile court equivalent of sentencing. Because he is charged as a juvenile, the Free Press is not using his name.

Switalski said the prosecutor's office "creatively, but correctly" charged the boy in January after autopsy results came back on the 26-week-old fetus found in November buried on the farm the boy's family lives on. The boy and his then-girlfriend, a now 17-year-old Armada Township resident, told police that she wanted to end the pregnancy but did not want to tell their parents about it. They decided that he would beat her in the abdomen with a mini-bat, and the pregnancy ended in October.

The boy was charged with intentional conduct against a pregnant individual resulting in miscarriage or stillbirth, a rarely used 15-year felony charge. The girl was never charged, and sat among the boy's relatives and supporters in court Thursday.

"It does not have to define you," Switalski told the boy, who said almost nothing during the hearing.

His attorney, Miranda Massie, had no objection to most of the terms of probation, but questioned the constitutionality and appropriateness of having the boy perform 200 hours of community service at Clinton Township-based Compassion Pregnancy Center. She said the center is overtly anti-abortion, works religious themes into its counseling and gives questionable information to people seeking help. She is looking into whether that portion of the sentence can be appealed.

The boy would not counsel or interview teens or women facing an unwanted pregnancy, but Massie said it was still an inappropriate place to require him to volunteer. His counselor sent Switalski a letter saying working at the center could make it difficult for the boy to deal with the guilt and grief he feels over what happened, and Massie noted that a similar center gave the boy and his then-girlfriend inaccurate advice about whether they could get an abortion without parental consent.

"It's what led them into taking the actions they took," Massie said.

Switalski said the sentence is proper.

"If the message is 'What can we do to help save the pregnancy?' I'm not going to take issue with that message," he said.

Contact NATE TRELA at 586-469-8087 or trela@freepress.com.

Teenager might be tried as adult

Robert Warner

The Battle Creek Enquirer

A 14-year-old Battle Creek Central High School freshman accused of stabbing another teen and an off-duty police officer during a fight at a football game faces a hearing next month on whether he will be tried as an adult.

Aaron Jones faces two felony assault charges. A third charge, disorderly conduct, was dropped Thursday by prosecutors.

Calhoun County Circuit Judge Allen Garbrecht, sitting as a family court judge, took testimony in phase one of a preliminary hearing on the charges on Thursday. He ordered a phase-two hearing on whether the case against Aaron Jones should stay in juvenile court or be moved into adult court. Prosecutors want to try Jones as an adult.

During Thursday's hearing, Mark Guy, 19, testified that Jones and Guy's cousin had been involved in a dispute a couple of weeks earlier.

On the night of the game, Guy said, Jones was holding a black-handled folding knife as Jones approached Guy and his cousin in the stands during the game.

Guy testified that Jones put the knife in his right pocket before Jones punched Guy in the jaw. A fight ensued, Guy said, and he didn't realize he'd been stabbed until after the fight was over.

Officer Tom Rivera of the Battle Creek Police Department testified that he was off duty and working security at the game when he saw the fight in the stands and intervened. Rivera said he grabbed Guy in a bear-hug and someone else tackled Jones.

It wasn't until he had handcuffed Guy and escorted him out of the stands that Rivera realized he'd been cut on his forearm and was bleeding severely, the officer testified.

Rivera said he had one cut that required 23 stitches to close and another that needed five stitches. He said he is still rehabilitating from his injuries, and that there may be some permanent damage.

Detective Dennis Wilkins testified that he recovered a knife from a bloody area in the stands after the fight.

Defense attorney Donald Hammond argued there had been no evidence presented that showed the knife recovered belonged to Jones, nor that any witnesses had seen Jones stab anyone.

Jones is charged with assault with intent to cause great bodily harm less than murder, and assault with intent to cause great bodily harm.

Garbrecht ruled that, for the purposes of the preliminary hearing, Assistant Prosecutor Mike Lind had proved there was probable cause to believe that the crimes had been committed and that Jones was the perpetrator.

Jones was returned to the Calhoun County Juvenile Home, where he is being held on \$50,000 bail. He will undergo psychological testing before the phase-two hearing, scheduled for Oct. 25.

Sep 30, 10:23 AM EDT

Governor vetoes funding for youth prison

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Friday vetoed funding for a Lake County youth prison in the state budget that starts Saturday.

The veto, which was expected, effectively ends the state's contract with the Michigan Youth Correctional Facility about 65 miles north of Grand Rapids. It saves about \$18 million in the state's roughly \$40 billion budget.

The Democratic governor vetoed the funding Friday morning, spokeswoman Heidi Hansen said. She was expected to sign remaining budget bills Friday.

Sen. Michelle McManus, a Lake Leelanau Republican, criticized the governor's decision.

"Despite the outcry from the community and the hard work done by the Legislature to find other savings in the corrections budget, she refused to consider any alternatives," said McManus, whose district includes the youth prison.

On the Net:

Gov. Jennifer Granholm: <http://www.michigan.gov/gov>

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

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9/30

IN A T

ACQUITTED

**Ex-principal
cleared of sex
contact charge**

A jury Thursday found a former school principal not guilty of three counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Clark N. Sexton, 30, of Westland was charged in February.

The charges stem from Sexton's alleged involvement with a student at Agape Christian Academy in Wayne County's Canton from 1999 to 2001, police Sgt. Rick Pomorski said.

Sexton was principal of the school until May 2004.

The student was 14-16 years old at the time of the alleged incidents, prosecutors said.

By the Associated Press

Outraged teens fight against violent game

September 29, 2005

BY PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

The hero is a troubled kid who is bullied while negotiating the social trials of middle school. He gives swirlies and beats classmates and even teachers.

According to various magazines and Internet sites devoted to video games, the action is part of "Bully," a new video game. It isn't due out until next spring, but it is already raising questions about its effect on kids.

The premise of the game, developed by the company Rockstar, has some worried about whether teens will understand that the game's cyber strategies won't work in their real-world schools.

"We're still trying to understand, as a society, that there's nothing funny about bullying," Glenn Stutsky, a clinical instructor in social work at Michigan State University and an expert on bullying, said last week.

"Bullying is abuse. It's not boys being boys; it's not a rite of passage.

"What we don't want kids to think is that strategies in the virtual school yard will be successful, or even an option, in the real school yard."

Rockstar's spokesman wouldn't discuss the game, which is to be released in April. "There is no buzz. It doesn't exist because it's not finished,"

Rodney Walker said last week. "We hope people will respect the creative process and ignore unfounded rumors and not spread unfounded rumors."

Rockstar has produced some very controversial games, including the "Grand Theft Auto" trilogy, in which players steal cars by almost any means, including murder.

Alarms about "Bully" have gone up, ranging from online petitions to student protests.

Taylor Malzahn, a 16-year-old junior at Lake Orion High School, was so alarmed by the description she read in her younger brother's video game magazine that she rallied her classmates against "Bully."

"I was actually just shocked that my brother thought the game was cool," Taylor said. Her class in educational leadership had just discussed bullying, so she brought the article to school. The class decided to campaign against the game.

"We want to get the message across that being called 'stupid' is not fun and should not be rewarded with points," said Megan Sulewski, 17, a senior at Lake Orion. "It can also teach them violent ways, and they'll use them in real life."

Lake Orion senior Joe Nowicki, 17, said the class is worried that "Bully" could even trigger a Columbine-style tragedy, where the two perpetrators left messages saying they wanted revenge for previous bullying.

"After that incident, I don't think you can overlook a game like this," he said.

To read more

For past Free Press stories on bullying, why children bully and how to help children control aggression, go to www.freep.com/news/childrenfirst/bully23e_20050523.htm.

What parents can do

Controversial video games such as "Bully" put parents in a tough spot. Too little parental objection can lead to kids playing inappropriate games. Too much parental objection can lead to rebellion that only piques interest in the game.

Michigan State University's Glenn Stutsky, an expert on bullying, has this advice:

Don't appear to jump to conclusions and have a knee-jerk reaction. That will only make kids more curious.

Do take a reasonable approach. Find out what the game consists of, talk about it with your child and decide together what's good and bad about it.

Make sure to know and understand every video and computer game your child owns.

Debra Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni an assistant professor in Wayne State University's School of Social Work, said she wouldn't be buying the game for her children.

"We know that in terms of school violence and school shootings in particular, one of the main factors that contributed to the school violence was bullying," Jozefowicz-Simbeni said. "We know that media has an effect on kids across the board."

Some retailers, such as Wal-Mart, say they haven't made a decision on stocking the game. Many stores won't sell ultra-violent video games. Best Buy declined to sell "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" after it was rated for adults only, spokesman Jay Musolf said.

Video games can be rated in one of seven categories, ranging from early childhood through adults only, said Patricia Vance, president of the National Software Ratings Board. "Bully" won't be rated until it's released. However, less bloody violence may give it a rating suitable for teens, despite the questionable message. Back at Lake Orion High, however, at least some students were hopeful.

"I feel like we can make a difference, even if it's just one class," Taylor said.

Her class was busy putting the finishing touches on their campaign this week. In one classroom, students made posters and signs. In another, other students sat at computers writing letters to congressional representatives and local retailers.

"If we can get one mom or dad to not buy the game, we've been successful," teacher Dave Simpson said.

Contact PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI at 586-469-4681 or pwalsh@freepress.com.

To get involved

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed legislation Sept. 12 making it illegal to rent or sell violent video games to minors, though a trade group has said it plans to sue. The law takes effect Dec. 1. • Sign an online petition about the video game "Bully" at www.petitiononline.com/corinne/petition.html. Contact Rockstar Games or its parent company, Take-Two Interactive Software, at 622 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, 646-536-2842 weekdays during business hours.

September 30, 2005

La. woman fled abuse, lawyer says Agencies to get items donated to professed evacuee in Mason

By Christine Rook
Lansing State Journal

MASON - Kim Horn may not have been a victim of Hurricane Katrina as she portrayed herself to be, but her lawyer said she is a victim.

Horn, 42, fled to Michigan from Louisiana to escape an abusive relationship, said Lansing attorney James White, Horn's court-appointed lawyer.

While here, she told the public she was a hurricane victim and graciously accepted thousands of dollars in money and gifts. Within days of going public with her plight, police had her in handcuffs. She was charged with a felony, larceny under false pretenses, which carries a five-year prison term.

"Being in Ingham County Jail is the safest she has been in some period of time," White told 55th District Judge Thomas Boyd on Thursday morning as a preliminary hearing was to get under way. The hearing was adjourned to Oct. 20 to give the defense more time to prepare a case.

White was trying to emphasize the threat Horn had faced in her home state of Louisiana. When the topic of reducing bail came up Thursday, Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Debra Bouck said she didn't want it set too low.

Horn's abuser "now knows she's in the area," Bouck said. "If he shows up, I don't want her to leave."

Boyd trimmed Horn's bail from \$25,000 to \$10,000, but as of Thursday afternoon, she was still in the jail.

If Horn is convicted, hers will be a case involving numerous victims, in particular the residents of Mason who donated so much to her cause.

She had told folks that her home outside New Orleans had been destroyed by Katrina. That story, plus the fact that she had gone to school in Mason, caused people to reach out.

"I don't understand victimizing an entire community to meet your needs," Mayor Robin Naeyaert said. "Just in this community, let alone this entire county, there are numerous services for women who are victims of abuse."

Judge Boyd also agreed to allow officials to take the donations of goods and cash - which are technically evidence - and return them to the agencies that sent them, or give them to the needy. Outside of court, White talked about how Horn had endured 15 years of abuse. He portrayed her as desperate to stay in Michigan and frightened to return to Louisiana.

"When her support system broke down here in Michigan," White said, "she was faced with some tough decisions."



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Michigan

September 30, 2005

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has proclaimed October 2005 Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Michigan.

"Spanning centuries, cultures and continents, domestic violence is a tragic epidemic that has plagued our society," said the governor's proclamation. "I proclaim October 2005 as Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Michigan and I urge all citizens to join in the efforts to end this serious problem."

Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board defines domestic violence as the occurrence of any of the following acts by a person that is not an act of self-defense:

- Causing or attempting to cause physical or mental harm to a family or household member.
- Placing a family or household member in fear of physical or mental harm.
- Causing or attempting to cause a family or household member to engage in involuntary sexual activity by force, threat of force, or duress.
- Engaging in activity toward a family or household member that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed, or molested.

The board, whose members are appointed by the governor, is a body charged with efforts to eliminate domestic violence in the state. It is administratively housed within Michigan Department of Human Services.

"A better educated public is one key to communities supporting battered families, eliminating domestic violence and holding batterers accountable for their terrible deeds," said DHS director Marianne Udow.

During Domestic Violence Awareness Month, local domestic violence programs throughout the state will offer a variety of events. Please contact your local domestic violence program to find out more information about events scheduled in your area.

The national hotline for help from domestic violence is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) voice and 800-787-3224 TTY.

For more information about the Michigan Domestic Violence and Treatment board visit the Department of Human Services Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs

Home heating help dries up early

Friday, September 30, 2005

By John Tunison
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- Low-income residents trying to stay warm this winter may be in for a double-whammy.

As energy experts this week predicted heating costs would rise at least 40 percent this winter, a key social service agency announced Wednesday it was out of money to help needy families pay utility bills.

"We're turning people away, probably about 40 or 50 since Monday," said Susan Cervantes, program manager with the Ottawa County Community Action Agency.

The agency is considered the lead group for providing assistance with paying utility bills in Ottawa County. It has provided \$138,000 in payments to 797 households so far this year, as well as about \$160,000 in 2004.

Cervantes said the demand for assistance has outstripped the grants available through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, the state's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families fund and the Michigan Public Service Commission.

"The average size of bills that came in this year were astronomical compared to other years," she said.

The agency makes one-time utility bill payments, up to \$200, often to help families restore service that has been terminated.

Cervantes hopes more grant funds may be available in November and January.

"What we are hoping is that people can find it within their own resources, possibly from family or friends, to pay the bills," she said.

The lack of funding for utility-bill assistance at this stage of the year is unusual, she said.

"No one here can remember the last time we have run out of money, and we have been doing this service since 1989," Cervantes said.

Sherry Miller, director of 211 of Ottawa County, said keeping homes warm this winter could be difficult for many families.

"With the elimination of CAA as a resource, it leaves few options for people with utility needs," she said.

Heating costs to skyrocket

The cost to heat a typical home with natural gas is expected to increase by \$56 a month this winter.

By AP and MONROE EVENING NEWS STAFF

Most Monroe County residents will pay much more for natural gas this heating season, largely due to recent hurricanes in the Gulf.

Aquila said it soon will boost rates to customers to cover the cost it's paying for natural gas from its suppliers.

"We're basically ironing out the final adjustment we'll be doing for Oct. 1," Aquila spokesman Paul Livernois said Wednesday.

The increase, still being determined, will be the result of a continuing trend of rising prices and specifically the impacts of the hurricane. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita damaged some drilling rigs, put pressure on supplies and inundated the Henry Hub, a major natural gas terminal in the Southeast.

The Michigan Public Service Commission said Michigan residents who now pay an average of \$140 each winter month to heat their homes with natural gas could end up paying at least \$56 a month more because of the hurricane damage.

"The commission is expecting average increases for natural gas of at least 40 percent this winter, assuming normal weather," PSC spokeswoman Judy Palnau said Tuesday. "What we're doing now is gearing up to let people know about the alarming increase."

In the last month, Katrina and Rita have forced the evacuation of 683 offshore platforms in the gulf and have cut natural gas production by about 20 percent, the U.S. Mineral Management Service says.

Pavel Molchanov, an energy analyst with Raymond James & Co. in Houston, said that the natural gas price spike after Hurricane Katrina comes after a period of rising prices.

"A lot of people that have managed to get by in past winters won't be able to make it this winter," said Kathleen Walgren, executive director of the Detroit-based Heat and Warmth Fund. It provides emergency energy help to low-income families.

Lyla Washington, 80, of Detroit, a retired day care director, said her income of less than \$800 a month makes it hard for her to cover any increase in heating costs.

"I live here alone with my two cats, and so I keep the rooms closed off to keep the heat in," she said. "Last week, it was chilly at night and so if it's going to be chilly now, wait till winter. I think it's going to be kind of rough."

Wholesale natural gas prices paid by utilities have risen from about \$5 per thousand cubic feet in 2001 to about \$12 today.

About 55 percent of the nation's homes use natural gas for heating and cooking, the Washington-based American Gas Association says.

In Michigan, 79 percent of homes heat with natural gas, 10 percent with propane, 7 percent with electricity and the rest with heating oil, wood or solar power. Aquila serves about 45,000 customers in Monroe County.

Our View: There are needs in mid-Michigan

Midland Daily News

09/29/2005

The news was fairly ominous Wednesday as utility regulators predicted Michigan residents would see the cost for heating their homes jump as much as 40 percent this winter.

That means if you paid \$140 a month last year, your bill this year likely will be close to \$200. This news comes on top of gasoline prices near \$3 a gallon.

For those struggling to get by, it will be a very difficult winter in Michigan.

Local agencies such as the Salvation Army and Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency already are stressed in terms of having enough money to provide for heating assistance. The MMCAA ran out of money in August and has had to turn away 400 families since then.

Damage to natural gas facilities caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita has caused the spike in heating costs.

While the Mid-Michigan area has been very generous in donating supplies and money for the Gulf Coast relief efforts, the story on rising natural gas prices for Michigan residents means there will be serious challenges and needs here at home, too. We hope area residents remember that as they decide whether to participate in the annual United Way campaign currently under way or whether to make donations to local charities and churches. The local need will be great, not only this year but also when winter strikes with a vengeance next year.

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Employment benefits secure - for the moment Ruling a boon to state's same-sex couples

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Friday, September 30, 2005

Before voters in Michigan last year approved a proposal banning same-sex marriage, we warned that its real impact might take the form of squashing domestic-partner benefits available to many same-sex couples and their dependents.

The proposal wouldn't impact same-sex marriage, we noted, because Michigan already had laws prohibiting same-sex marriage.

But it carried the potential to eviscerate domestic-partner benefits because of language that said "the union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage or similar union for any purpose."

The courts might just interpret "similar union" to mean civil unions and that "for any purpose," we feared, could cause domestic-partner benefits to disappear for employees of state and many local governments, and of several universities. Those benefits typically run from health and life insurance to bereavement leave.

In fact, the benefits started disappearing even before the courts ruled on the matter. Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm in December, for example, opted not to offer benefits to same-sex couples in new labor contracts until a court ruled on their legality.

Republican Attorney General Mike Cox then issued a legal opinion saying the proposal's passage prohibited the city of Kalamazoo from providing domestic partner benefits in future contracts. More than 20 same-sex couples employed by Kalamazoo, the state and universities replied with a lawsuit.

Their benefits and those of other same-sex couples in the state appear secure - for the moment - thanks to Ingham County Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk's ruling preserving them. Draganchuk found that health insurance coverage is a benefit of employment, not marriage. Therefore, employment, not marriage, should define who receives it.

Unfortunately, her ruling is expected to be appealed by opponents of spousal benefits for same-sex couples, with the state Supreme Court ultimately deciding the issue.

Hopefully, that tribunal will uphold Draganchuk's decision. Same-sex couples and their dependents have fought long and hard for the same employment benefits offered to other employees and their dependents. Those benefits are vital for all employees and their dependents.

September 29, 2005

CROPSEY SEEKS T.R.O. ON SAME SEX BENEFITS

Resolutions urging the Legislature to call on the Supreme Court to issue a temporary restraining order preventing the state from offering same-sex benefits were introduced in the Senate Thursday.

Over shouted objections, SR 68 and SCR 33 remained on the Senate floor for action next week.

Both resolutions were introduced by Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt), who earlier this week had called for Governor Jennifer Granholm to delay trying to implement medical benefits for same-sex relationships for state workers.

Those benefits had been negotiated in 2004, but Ms. Granholm held those in abeyance until a court ruled on whether a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage and similar unions under law would ban those benefits.

On Tuesday, Ingham Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk ruled that the benefits were allowed because they were a condition of employment and not of marriage. The ruling overturned an opinion from Attorney General Mike Cox that such benefits could not be granted to same-sex couples where one is a public employee.

The resolutions said the circuit action approved of benefits to "homosexual couples in unions that mimic marriage despite the constitutional language."

The resolutions call on the Supreme Court to quickly hear the issue, and until the matter is heard to issue a temporary restraining order "to prevent the spending of taxpayer monies to fund benefits for homosexual unions."

Published September 30, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Partners: Ruling on same-sex benefits sets stage for civil rights case

To her credit, Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Joyce Draganchuk tried valiantly to argue in a Tuesday ruling that the Michigan Constitution does not forbid public institutions from granting health and other benefits to same-sex couples.

Unfortunately, the language of Proposal 2 is abundantly clear: It's meant to turn a large number of Michigan residents into second-class citizens.

The judge's ruling undoubtedly will be appealed. Sadly, the state's high court will face the same discriminatory language, the same discriminatory intent of Proposal 2.

The constitutional recourse for reform is another amendment that nullifies Proposal 2 and restores civil rights and full citizenship status to all Michigan residents.

This is, indeed, a civil rights battle. Proposal 2, passed by voters last November, amended the constitution to forbid marriage except between a man and a woman. But an interpretation of six words in the amendment - "or similar union for any purpose" - leads some (including Attorney General Mike Cox) to conclude that tax-supported institutions cannot extend health-care benefits to domestic partners.

It's an open question as to whether most Michigan voters understood the full weight of Proposal 2. Certainly its proponents trumpeted the sanctity of traditional, heterosexual marriage as the reason. Yet, some of those proponents were deceitful about what it could eventually mean - thousands of adults, and children, losing access to health-care benefits.

Draganchuk argues that health-care benefits for a spouse or a partner stem from employment, not marriage. Our reading of the amendment, though, is that Proposal 2 specifically targets, however unfairly, civil unions and the benefits that those unions should rightly allow.

Of course, Michigan already has a law on the books that defines legal marriage as between a man and a woman. The LSJ supports this law. For the record: We also endorse civil unions, so that gay and lesbian couples can access a host of legal rights and benefits.

The larger issue, again, is one of fairness to a distinct group of citizens. Whatever one thinks of gays and lesbians, is it really Michigan's intent to punish them, their partners and their children for their sexual orientation? We hope not.



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News Release

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Five public hearings scheduled on proposed day care rules

September 29, 2005

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Children and Adult Licensing will conduct five public hearings in October to take comments on proposed licensing rules governing child care centers in Michigan.

Since taking office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has made childhood development a priority. Granholm asked DHS director Marianne Udow to strengthen child care standards and improve child care facilities.

"Licensed child care facilities provide more than a play environment for children," Udow said. "Licensed centers are an integral part of a comprehensive set of child development services. The rules require annual staff training that will improve the hands-on care of children."

The proposed rules modify educational requirements for program directors, establish the position of "lead caregiver" and set minimum annual training requirements for all caregivers. The rules establish maximum group size requirements for children under 3 years of age and include requirements on diapering, sleeping/napping, daily program activities, eating, transportation and other issues that impact children.

The hearings will be held:

- **Wednesday, Oct. 5 from 3-7:30 P.M. at Bay de Noc Community College Auditorium, 2001 North Lincoln Road, Escanaba.**
- **Thursday, Oct. 6 from 3-7:30 P.M. at Gaylord Evangelical Free Church Auditorium, 1649 M-32 East, Gaylord.**
- **Tuesday, Oct. 11 from 3-7:30 P.M. at Prince Conference Center at Calvin College Willow Room, 1800 East Beltline SE in Grand Rapids.**
- **Wednesday, Oct. 12 from 3-7:30 P.M. at Macomb Intermediate School District Central Training Room 100 A/B/C, 44001 Garfield Road, Clinton Township.**
- **Thursday, Oct. 13 from 3-7:30 P.M. at Holiday Inn-South Ballroom H, 6820 South Cedar Street in Lansing.**

(more)

The public hearing will be conducted in compliance with the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act in an accessible building with handicap parking available. Anyone needing assistance to take part in the hearing can call (517) 335-6124 to make accommodations.

Comments on the rules may be made in person at the hearing or by mail, fax, or e-mail until 5 P.M. on Oct. 14, 2005. The rules are promulgated by authority conferred on the Department of Human Services. They will take effect 180 days after filing with the Secretary of State.

The rules [Rule Set 2003-039FI] are published on the Michigan Government Web site at <http://www.michigan.gov/orr> and in the Michigan Register in the September 15, 2005 issue.

Copies of the draft rules may also be obtained by mail or e-mail from Department of Human Services Office of Children and Adult Licensing, P. O. Box 30650, Lansing MI 48909-8150, telephone (517) 373-8300 voice and (517) 335-6121 fax. To acquire the rules by e-mail send a message to manowik@michigan.gov

The DHS Office of Child and Adult Licensing conducts onsite evaluations of licensed child care facilities to determine compliance with state law and licensing rules, consults with child welfare organization to improve the quality of service and investigates complaints alleging administrative rules or statute violations. It administers licenses for adult foster care, child day care, and child welfare institutions in Michigan.

For more information on licensing go to www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on "Doing Business with DHS".

State to adopt county's successful child-welfare plan; Program strives to keeps kids with their loved ones

Date: Thursday, September 29, 2005

Source: Detroit Free Press

Author: DAN CORTEZ

Two years ago, J.J. Hitch was headed into foster care. He was living in Utica and was being removed from the care of his father because of family problems.

Hitch was placed with his grandparents, who happened to live two blocks away.

It was an easy fit. Hitch got to stay in touch with his friends and be around people who cared about him.

"You need to know somebody cares about you because you feel abandoned by your family," Hitch, 18, said last week.

Keeping Hitch so close to home was made possible with a new approach to child welfare that's been adopted by the Macomb County Department of Human Services. And with so much success in Macomb, the state announced earlier this month that it would roll out the program throughout the state.

The Family-to-Family Initiative -- created through the nationally recognized Casey Foundation -- involves interactions among several community organizations to make a more informed decision about whether to remove a child from a home. And if a removal is necessary, the new approach tries to keep children in their same neighborhoods so their lives aren't as disrupted.

Last week, the county's Department of Human Services held a fair at its Warren office to promote the program and the South Warren Family Resource Network -- a conglomeration of a local church, anti-drug groups and the county department that is working to help kids in south Warren. It's that kind of network that helps the county agency make more informed decisions about what to do with children in dangerous environments.

Not only are the parents involved, but so are other family members, Child Protective Services and others -- such as drug-prevention groups -- who can help in certain cases.

"Anybody who has an interest in the child comes to the table," said Cheri Duncan, the Roseville community specialist for Solid Ground, a nonprofit that provides basic services to families in need.

To explain the approach, Duncan suggested a situation in which a father is using drugs at home. In the past, Child Protective Services would come to the home, see that there was drug use, and pull the child out of the residence. Now, the state would sit down with the family and any relatives or close friends, as well as a consultant from a drug rehabilitation agency.

The group would determine what is best for the child; removing him or her from the home would be a last resort.

The team decision-making leads to fewer kids being pulled away from their families.

"Generally, children are better off with their families even if they've had some problems," said Dawn Walker, who directs the initiative throughout Macomb County.

The program seems to be working. For instance, with the old approach, social workers were taking about 100 kids out of south Warren homes annually. That number is down to about 80, Walker said.

And six years ago, there were 99 registered foster homes in the county. Now, after recruiting more foster parents, there are about 200, Walker said. That makes it easier to place children near their homes.

Instead of having a child who lives in Warren move to northern Macomb County, Walker said, the new approach keeps the child in Warren -- whether it is in a foster home, with a relative or with a family friend or neighbor.

"I think the kids respond much better," said Kathy Ross, 47, of Macomb Township, who has taken in 37 children over 15 years as a foster-care mother. "Before, they had no communication with family or friends. They were starting their life all over again, which isn't good for a kid."

To become a foster-care parent, call Patti Laukonis at the Macomb County Department of Human Services, 586-469-5834.

Couple face fraud charges

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Friday, September 30, 2005

A Jackson couple face a preliminary hearing Tuesday on charges of illegally obtaining hurricane relief aid.

Mark J. and Jennifer L. Miner were charged with felony false pretenses and conspiracy to commit false pretenses. Investigators said the Miners falsely claimed they were driven out of their home in Mississippi by Hurricane Katrina, for which they received \$1,565 from the American Red Cross branch in Jackson.

Prosecutors said the couple might also have illegally received federal aid. The Miners lived in Mississippi until their house trailer was repossessed in June and they moved to Jackson, prosecutors said.

Police arrested Mark Miner on unrelated charges last week, and he remains in the Jackson County Jail. Jennifer turned herself in Tuesday, a family member said. District Judge Darryl Mazur arraigned her and freed her on a personal-recognizance bond, court records show.

Take on other issues before tackling universal preschool

Oakland Press

Web-posted Sep 29, 2005

EDITORIAL

Oakland County's Democratic state representatives seem to have their hearts in the right place, but we have to question whether they are in touch with reality.

Democrats locally and around the state this week were trumpeting their proposed legislation that would require universal preschool education for all Michigan 4-year-olds by 2010. The ambitious proposal would affect an estimated 140,000 children within the first five years.

As Rep. Andy Meisner of Ferndale said: "This is a return on investment that we cannot afford not to make in our kids. We know that kids who start early are better learners, they tend to be more socially acclimated and they tend to be better prepared for ... the challenges they face down the road."

Meisner and colleagues point to studies that show almost 90 percent of a child's brain development occurs before age 5. One study released last year said \$17 in taxpayer costs including \$11 in criminal justice expenses are saved for every \$1 invested in early childhood education. Other studies suggest this type of spending results in higher test scores and an increased likelihood of attending college.

That makes a lot of sense, but we have to wonder about state priorities as we continue to struggle with excessive unemployment, an anemic economy and resulting budget cuts including the ongoing struggle to fund K-16 education.

According to estimates by House Democrats, all of this would cost \$85 million in the first year and \$400 million during the first five years. And Democrats admit they have no idea how to pay for it. The best Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi of Farmington Hills could come up with this week were anticipated increases in state revenue and the old standby, closing tax loopholes.

While our children are one of our most precious commodities, they should be OK even without this plan. The needy are eligible for early assistance under the federal Head Start program or Michigan's School Readiness program.

And then there all those children, now adults, who never were afforded such programs and turned out just fine.

Friday, September 30, 2005

Project is a blessing for grandparents raising children

By Betty DeRamus / The Detroit News

Already swamped with grief over two murders -- the fatal shootings of her daughter and her daughter's fiance -- 58-year-old Pat Kaczynski faces another tidal wave of a challenge. She must bring up her daughter's 3-year-old child.

This makes the Taylor grandmother, whose daughter's killer was sentenced Wednesday, part of a stressed-out and sometimes sorrow-burdened army: grandparents raising grandchildren.

That army is growing. In 1990, 3.5 million American children lived in their grandparents homes. By 2000, that number had soared to 4.5 million.

In 2002, 166,705 Michigan grandparents had one grandchild or more under 18 living with them, and 70,044 Michigan grandparents were responsible for meeting grandchildren's basic needs, according to federal census figures.

No simple story

But you can't tell this story simply by splashing around in a pool of numbers or spewing streams of statistics.

It takes someone like Crystal White to tell it right.

White is program director of a free, year-long program called Project Guide. It's sponsored by Neighborhood Service Organization, which celebrates its 50th anniversary on Oct. 29 at Detroit's Renaissance Center Marriott hotel.

Project Guide helps boost the morale and coping skills of Metro Detroit grandparents raising grandchildren.

It does that mainly through weekly two and one-half hour support meetings which grandparents and children attend separately.

"The grandparents realize they are not alone, and the children learn being loved and cared for by a grandparent is a privilege and not something to be ashamed of," White said.

Juanita Davis, a Detroit resident who graduated from the program last year, agreed.

"I thought I had a problem and then I met women with almost no income and raising five grandchildren," she said. "It gave me the strength to do what I got to do to raise my grandson."

The project also provides outings, retreats, recreation and information about parenting, nutrition, coping strategies and financial and legal resources.

Reasons abound

Grandparents in the project range in ages from 42-91 and come mostly from Detroit or nearby suburbs. But there are all kinds of reasons why they wind up feeding, clothing and rearing grandchildren.

A child's parent might be stumbling around in a haze or drugs. Or have lost custody of their children for abandoning, abusing or neglecting them.

A child's parents also might be locked up in prison. Or mentally ill. Or dead.

What most disturbs White, however, is that already fragile grandparents sometimes become so wrung dry from the financial and emotional strain of raising grandchildren that they suffer heart attacks and strokes.

This, says White, is why the project emphasizes stress management. "Stress kills is not just a slogan. That's for real."

For more information about this program or referrals to other agencies, you can reach White at (313) 933-2583.



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DHS to close Fullerton District office on October 3 Services will be consolidated with Tireman and Grand River/Warren offices

September 30, 2005

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) director Marianne Udow announced today that the department will close its Fullerton District office in Wayne County on October 3, 2005. The district staff will move to the Grand River/Warren and Tireman Districts.

“This action allows the department to maintain client service at an acceptable level while at the same time addressing current budget realities,” Udow said. “There will be no layoffs or staff reductions associated with this process, and there are no relocation costs other than for transporting equipment and files from Fullerton to the two sites.”

While there may be some immediate travel inconvenience, no DHS client or his or her family will be deprived of services or benefits because of this change. Prior to the office closure, current Fullerton clients will receive letters telling them which office their case has been reassigned to and the address and phone number of their DHS Specialist. In most cases clients will continue to have the same caseworker.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

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